

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH LERNES "BEAR" HEBERT,
ACTING DIRECTOR, OFFICER AND ENLISTED PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT, OFFICE OF THE
UNDERSECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR PERSONNEL AND READINESS AND U.S. ARMY MAJOR
ROY WHITLEY, PROJECT MANAGER, RETROACTIVE STOP LOSS PAY SUBJECT:
RETROACTIVE STOP LOSS PAY TIME: 12:13 P.M. EDT DATE: WEDNESDAY, JULY 28,
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LIEUTENANT JENNIFER CRAGG (Office of the Secretary of Defense
for Public Affairs): I'd like to welcome you all to the Department of
Defense's Bloggers Roundtable for Wednesday, July 28th, 2010. My name
is Lieutenant Jennifer Cragg with the Office of the Secretary of Defense
for Public Affairs and I'll be moderating this call today.

A note to everyone on the line, please remember to clearly state
your name and organization you're with prior to asking your question. And
also, after you ask your question, if you could place your phone on mute
if possible. We want to make sure we hear both of the -- (inaudible) --
today. As indicated in our blog post, our guests are Lernes J. Hebert.
He's the acting director, Officer and Enlisted Personnel Management, for
the Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness.
Joining him today is U.S. Army Major Roy Whitley. He's the Army's
project manager for the Retroactive Stop Loss Special Pay.

Sir, I'd like to turn it over to you first, Mr. Hebert, if you'd
like to start with an opening statement, and then we'll go to questions.
And, of course, Major Whitley, if you want to add anything too, be my
guest.

So, sir, the floor is yours. Please go ahead.

MR. HEBERT: Thank you very much. Well, first, I want to thank
all of you for joining us today. This is a very important program for
the department. We've been advertising the availability of this
retroactive stop-loss pay for military members who served between
September 11th, 2001 and September 30th, 2009 for a number of months now.

But as we approach the October 21st deadline for getting
applications in, the department is going on a full-court press to try and
make sure we can get the word out. And to the extent that you find this

is a worthy effort, we'll ask you to ask your followers to tweet, buzz, e-mail or post on this topic to get the word out to anyone who is affiliated with the department.

You know, as you may well know, many individuals were asked to stay beyond their initial separation date or retirement date. And in recognition of that service, Congress and the department have in place a statute which authorizes them \$500 a month for every month or partial month that they served on active duty in this status.

That being said, the department is not treating this as a marathon as we approach the October 21st date. It's more of a sprint, and -- but it's -- in traditional military fashion, it's a unit sprint. And that means that we're not successful until we get every member across that line. Every member who wants -- who is eligible and wants to apply for this should have that opportunity to do so. But they can only do that if they know about it. And our efforts today and throughout this entire period have been to get the word out through every means possible to those military members, veterans and their families.

In closing, I'd like to let you know that we have all of the information that we're going to talk about today posted out on www.defense.gov/stoploss, a special website. It has all the links to the service websites. I went and checked it again today. There is a plethora of information out there about how to apply and when to apply, whether or not you're eligible. But the key point that we'd like you to communicate to your -- to your readers is that if there's any question in their mind as to whether or not they're eligible, go ahead and apply. Most of the individuals who have gone through the process tell us that it takes no more than about half an hour to complete, and that's -- with many of the average payouts being between \$3(,000) and 4,000, that's a pretty good return on investment.

So that being said, Roy?

MAJ. WHITLEY: Yeah, I just had a few words, because I know the most important part is the -- are the questions for you folks. This is for the Army our third Blogger(s) Roundtable, and I'm thrilled to death that we're here, you know, in the fourth quarter. And the Army is very aware that we're in the fourth quarter; we know what that means.

So we kicked off a lot of initiatives. I'm sure you want to ask about them. A lot of your folks are hearing about them -- posters and our quick-claim process.

And just thrilled to death to give you the update. Thanks for having me again.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you both, gentlemen. I appreciate it. Tech sergeant, you were first on the line. Please go ahead with your question.

Q Yes, ma'am, thank you. I'm Tech Sergeant Julie Vecterline (ph) with the Air Force Public Affairs Agency. And my question is, about

how many service members do you believe are eligible for this? And other than getting the word out to all of them, what is the biggest challenge that the program is facing?

MR. HEBERT: Well, the -- to answer your last question first, the biggest challenge is just, as you indicated, getting the word out. We find that many people, once they're aware of the program, see the inherent value in filling out a simple form and receiving a check fairly shortly afterwards. You know, most of these applications are, on average, taking between two and four weeks to process. That's a pretty quick turnaround for most organizations, and we're striving to drive that down towards the two-week part.

As far as in -- the number of eligibles, we don't have specific numbers, because each service -- populations varied over time, and so -- and also, Congress passed a law that further restricted that eligibility last year to those individuals who had subsequently voluntarily extended their enlistment and received a bonus.

So to answer your question directly, we believe that there's roughly 145,000 eligible members, but again, that's a rough estimate, and it really depends on each individual case. What we want to reassure individuals is that they don't have to make the decision whether or not they're eligible; they just need to go to the website, fill out the form and apply, and we'll get them in touch with the right experts to ensure that if they're entitled to this money, that they receive it as quickly as possible.

Q Thank you. And who was that that just answered?

MR. HEBERT: I'm sorry. This is Lernes Hebert.

Q Oh, okay. Great. Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir.

And thank you, Tech Sergeant Vecterline (ph).

Jeff (sp), you were next. Please go ahead.

Q Thank you. How many service members are you still trying to reach? For example, I know the Army estimated that there were 120,000 people eligible for this pay. Service-wide, how many do you still need to reach? And can you provide us a breakdown by service?

MR. HEBERT: Well, as I indicated, the exact breakdown wouldn't be possible. But I will tell you we're trying to reach every eligible member who hasn't applied. Thus far, we've processed over 30,000 applications, and so we're still in a sprint, as I said, to try and reach the rest of the population.

Q Thank you. In the past, OSD has been able to say how many people were eligible. And even after the language was added about the bonus, they said, well, that affects about 10 percent. So 30,000, and

you have at least 120,000 for the -- for the Army, that means you've got three-quarters of the people you're still trying to reach with three months left. What has been the -- you know, what is the biggest challenge? And how are you going to meet that?

MR. HEBERT: Well, the biggest challenge, as I mentioned, is simply to get the word out to everyone through every means available. The -- you know, forums like this; through various media opportunities; we're using -- we're doing direct mailings. I tell you what, I'll let Major Whitley explain what the Army is doing, since you're asking information specific to the large Army contingent.

MAJ. WHITLEY: Hey, Jeff, nice talking to you again. I knew this question was coming, so I'm ready for it. The answer is, you knew about the 120,000; that was the folks on the Army's list going back a number of years. What we had done and we tracked quarterly in our reviews was who was applying from that known list. That's what we called it: The known list.

Mid-year review, I knew what that status was, and we identified 80,000 folks that we had to contact. So in the third quarter, we did an address hunt and location exercise, and we are finalizing it. In about four days, the last of 36,000 mailers will go out. We've already got 50,000 out there now, and we've heard back from 40 percent of all the folks we sent out, and we know it's arriving at 97 percent of the addresses, based on the returns.

So when the Army's finished with this, which is actually going to be in about 10 days, we will make an attempt to identify, locate and contact the better part of 120,000 folks. And we're putting posters out to all the training stations. Across the country, that's 1,600. And we already had it displayed in 400 (VA ?) support centers across the country. So there are things that are new since you and I have spoken last.

Q And how many have you gotten back -- applications have you gotten back just for the Army?

MAJ. WHITLEY: Yeah, just for me? It is different than some of the numbers you hear about, because you also hear about what DFAS has paid.

The Army right now has managed or -- managed the flow of 42,000 claims. So that includes, you know, denies and things like that. Those are paid -- probably the next week, we're going to be somewhere around 33,000, based on the mailer coming back in the last six weeks. But we're still much short -- we're short of what -- the goal, which is what you're going to get to, but certainly we're not comfortable, just finished. It's a full-court press.

Q Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, gentlemen. And someone just joined us. Can I get your name please? (No audible reply.)

Okay. I'll come back around if you want to add your name at a later time.

Thank you, Jeff (sp)

Karen (sp), you were next. Please go ahead.

Q I have two questions, if you don't mind. First, as a former Guard spouse -- we were Minnesota Guard, so there were a lot of people who were extended during that -- the surge. Is there a special provision for Guard members? I'm on your website right now, and I'm seeing that the Air Force has e-mail active and e-mail Guard reserve. Should Guard people be going straight to the regular e-mail if they're Army? Or should they be going to someone there at their armory? Or should they strictly go through this website?

MAJ. WHITLEY: Actually, they need to go to our website. We have component representatives in my office. We have a (superior ?) officer; that's me. We have a company-grade officer, which is for the Guard. We have a CW5, chief warrant five. For the reserve component, right out of HRC, human resource command. And we have a sergeant major that helps with the active component, and she is also -- she has reserve experience.

So we have all the compos represented --

Q Great.

MAJ. WHITLEY: -- in our office.

Q Great. Great. Because I know a lot of them are, you know -- after the last deployment just sort of -- they got out, and might be harder to find.

MAJ. WHITLEY: Oh, not the Guard, though. The Guard is very particular -- one-year enlistments, extensions, six-plus-twos, six-by-twos -- they're very unique. And that's why we insisted on having a compo rep in our office from the very beginning.

Q Great.

MAJ. WHITLEY: And I know there's a lot of phone calls that our captain has been making directly to Guardsmen and to units. We even track it by state, and we contact the states that we think are under-represented based on the number of Guard soldiers of -- in that population.

We know that certain states are doing very novel things. One state has done a -- in six months, they put out a postcard to every Guardsman; another state they put a team together -- it was Wisconsin, actually -- that are vetting all packets before they come to us. So they're having a lot of success in some of the states.

Q That's great to hear. My second question is, as a spouse, if you think your spouse may be eligible, I know that your website says "beneficiaries"; I'm assuming that is for the lost. Is there anything a spouse can do besides nag? (Laughs.)

MR. HEBERT: Well, you bring up a good point. I don't know if other spouses are like mine, but she has a "honey do" list for me that's quite extensive. And, you know, you just simply push it to the top of the list. And the key is reminding them that that October 21st date is creeping up on us, and so the sooner they can get their application in, the sooner they get the money back in their pockets. Q Okay. I'll send out the nag alert. Thank you very much.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, Karen (sp).

And thank you, gentlemen.

Dale, you were next. Please go ahead.

Q Good morning. This is Dale Kissinger from militaryavenue.com.

Just a real quick one. I don't understand how the Department of Defense, if they can get the Army to give you all the data on how many they have -- approximately, anyway -- what about the other services? You haven't asked them for their numbers? Or why are we not getting that total picture here from the Department of Defense?

And secondly, real quick, would be why would somebody be denied? And how many of the 30,000 that have applied have been denied? And what would you recommend to those that have applied on how to make sure they are accepted?

MR. HEBERT: Sure. Well, I'll tell you what. I -- we told you that it was approximately 145,000 that were eligible. The Army has given you their numbers. The Air Force has roughly 16,000 eligible, the Navy roughly 250 eligible, the Marine Corps 8,900 eligible. And so what other numbers were you looking for?

Q No, that's great. I just was looking for that. Somebody else asked it and you didn't have them, so that's why I kind of pushed on that a little bit.

MR. HEBERT: Well, again, these are approximate numbers. The total numbers eligible -- again, the key is to get to every eligible member and have them -- if there's -- if there's any doubt in their mind, and even members who are not eligible who think they might be eligible -- and have them simply submit the application. This is to get the word out to ensure that no member is left wondering on October 22nd. We've got to get the -- every individual out there who thinks they may be entitled to this money to get their application in.

So while we can talk about the total numbers and the statistics, I appreciate that -- how that's informative, but the real issue is trying

to get out to every eligible member or individual who thinks they're -- may be eligible and to have them get on the website and submit the application.

MAJ. WHITLEY (?): (Inaudible) --

Q Well, one of the ways to -- (inaudible) -- interest is by telling everybody how many might be eligible so that they can get ahead and look at your website so they might apply. MR. HEBERT: Sure.

Q That's the key.

MR. HEBERT: Sure.

Q But a follow on to that was --

MR. HEBERT: (Forty-five ?) thousand.

LT. CRAGG: Dale, I'm getting interference on your line, so I'm going to go ahead and skip you right quick.

Q Okay.

LT. CRAGG: I want to get to Bryant, and I'll come back. For some reason, when you're talking, I have interference. Bryant?

Q Hi --

MAJ. WHITLEY: This is Major Whitley. Before we move on, he had a second part of the question I think I can answer, about the denies. And it's kind of important, because I always tell folks, Congress requires us to report who has been denied, not who has been paid. Our job is to pay the folks that are eligible. That's our mission.

So I'll answer the deny question. The -- what's -- the reason they're denied generally is because they weren't eligible because they weren't on contract. What they don't understand, the claimants, is that being in the unit that was stop-lossed does not equal individual stop-loss. And it's really not their fault. Stop-loss has always been a force-management tool; it has not been a compensation tool, though once with the legislation it became a compensation challenge, it required (sealing ?) the records and so on.

So from the soldiers' perspective and ex-soldiers' perspective, it's very difficult to understand what they heard versus how it will be applied according to the legislation.

So you're only in the percentage that is somewhere around 10 percent. I guess. If you look at the roll numbers, it changes by the day. Some -- with the Army's case, about 1,600 to 1,800 was due to the bonus -- you know, bonus recipients, reenlistments with bonus. That was in the legislation. And then just, period, people not understanding their timeline.

But our office has gone back and we've looked at all the previous denies over the last eight months, and we're in fact reversing some of those if we believe there was some error made. The Army's not going to finish until we've relooked at every denied case. Because we can always pay you; we just can't file your claim for you. You need to file the claim. We'll get to the claim. We've got plenty of time for looking at claims. You just need to get them in. Q Thank you very much.

MR. HEBERT: Sure.

LT. CRAGG: And thank you. Sorry, sir, I didn't mean to interrupt you. And, Dale, I hear you loud and clear. So thank you, Dale.

Bryant, you were next. Please go ahead.

Q Hi. Thank you very much. This is Bryant Jordan, Military.com. Question is -- again, refers to spouses. Is there any way for a spouse of a soldier, airman, sailor, whatever -- who was stop-lossed who has since died to apply for this money?

MAJ. WHITLEY: Yes. On all the services' websites, I believe -- I certainly know mine -- we have an entry that is -- has the -- you know, what condition. And we have many. We know that going into the program there were just around a few that HRC took care of and we had no visibility of. Every week, we get claims in from surviving family members. And we take care of those one-on-one, and we do as much as the record says we can, and they go to the top of the list.

So if you want priority, it's first in, first out, unless it's a surviving family member. And I have a casefinder assigned just for the deceased cases. And that goes for the folks that passed away after they exit the service. We treat them all the same. If you're a family member -- because you're at a disadvantage. You don't understand the records. You don't understand the process. You don't know what the (ALIRAD ?) is. You don't know the regs. That's really our job. So there is no surviving family member that does not get taken care of immediately.

Q Thank you very much. Very good.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, Bryant.

And, Bill, you were next. Please go ahead.

Q Thanks, Lieutenant. Bill McMichael, Military Times.

Could you talk about the difficulty in reaching some of these folks, particularly since many of them are now out of the service? Sorry, you detailed some of your efforts in trying to go to Guard bureaus and so forth. But what about the folks who've moved or moved from their last home of record that the service knew of? What's -- talk about the challenges trying to get ahold of those people. And what steps have you taken to try to overcome that difficulty?

MR. HEBERT: Sure. Naturally, the items like the Bloggers Roundtable, the PA announcement, Twitter, Facebook, direct mailings, Federal Register. We've -- using DFAS notifying. We're working with the VA, with the various service associations and component associations. We've put the word out to recruiting stations.

Bottom line is, we have a very extended military family, as you -- as you well know from personal experience.

And so getting the word out through this extended military family to tell a friend is our means of getting to those individuals who are even remotely as -- located, and not normally contacting the military installations or organizations.

Q Okay. And I wanted to ask you also, you mentioned earlier the step that Congress took to restrict this program somewhat last year. Could you please detail that?

MR. HEBERT: Sure. Basically, it was to -- it restricted it to those individuals who voluntarily reenlisted or withdrew their retirement and subsequently received a bonus, so that they wouldn't -- you're not eligible if you received the bonus and you're drawing -- in other words, you took a voluntary action. You're no longer serving involuntary.

However, there may be an -- a portion of that time that you did serve involuntarily. And under this program, we simply want individuals to apply so that the experts can pore through their records and determine exactly what they're entitled to.

Q Thank you. Thank you.

MR. HEBERT: You're welcome.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you so much -- thank you so much, sir.

And thank you, Bill.

At this time what I'm going to do is I'm going to turn it back over to Mr. Hebert and Major Whitley for any final thoughts. We're going to be drawing close to today's roundtable, but I know a number of you are probably going to have follow-on questions, so at that time, if you want to forward them to me and I'll make sure I send them to both -- (inaudible).

So, Mr. Hebert, if you'd like to start first, and then I'll turn it over to Major Whitley.

MR. HEBERT: Sure. Thank you very much.

Well, first and foremost, again, thank you all for joining us today. As I indicated, this is very important to us. We are trying through whatever means possible to get the word out to the eligible population. We want every eligible member who -- or even members who

simply believe they might be eligible -- to submit their application. Again, they just have to have it postmarked by October 21st. It's a fairly straightforward process, about a half an hour of their time.

And that being said, we're going to continue to do everything we can on this end to get the word out. Again, it's www.defense.gov/stoploss. And if you don't mind including that link in your post, we'd greatly appreciate it, and asking your followers to tell a friend.

Major Whitley.

MAJ. WHITLEY: Yeah. Thanks for having me also. I always look forward to these sessions, because I know it's complicated and it's hard reaching all the folks.

We want you guys to help us remind folks. I know we have a survey in our quick-claims process, that we ask three questions: Did you know about us before? Was it easy? And did you tell a friend?

And the answer we're getting back is they're all telling friends, they're getting the word out. And it's important that they get their claim in. So pass the word.

Q Can I ask one last question? Before you go -- and I apologize if I sounded a little abrupt when I was asking about the numbers -- I thought I had those at my fingertips and I didn't, so I was annoyed at myself. Why is it so hard to reach all these people?

MR. HEBERT: Sure. I mean, as you can imagine, some individuals separate and go back to their home of record. Many of them, their home of record is simply away from military installations, and so the -- their associations with the units aren't as routine as they might be. Those individuals who separate and didn't retire, you know, aren't receiving that monthly check from the military where we can -- where that LES is going to remind them to do these sorts of things.

So we're reaching out to USO, the VA. We're using every organization that we can to get the word out. And -- but generally it's just because they're remotely located.

Roy, what's been your concerns?

MAJ. WHITLEY: Yeah. I'm the guy, you know, on the front lines in this kind of thing. I ask the questions every day. They leave the service, and they're very mobile. The demographic we're looking for are very mobile. And these guys go to college when they get out, go to college, they get jobs, and it is really hard tracking them down.

So, quite often, we actually contact their parents based on the last best address. And it's not that they don't want to be found; it's just that they're a little bit suspicious that the Army's actually coming out of the department, coming out to pay them money, and trying so hard to pay them. I answer legitimate -- legitimacy questions every day.

Well, we walk them all through it, and many of them just drop a 214 on our desk, and we take care of those also. I just think it's a mobile, you know, community, and we're just working hard at it.

Q And is it -- one challenge is you have so many people in rural neighborhoods?

MAJ. WHITLEY: You know, I don't know. We know there's a "last mile" issue in the factories, mills, farms. We always knew that was going to be a challenge and -- which is why we're out there in the recruiting stations and all the veteran service orgs and all the facilities. That's why we put out 2,000 posters across the country: because we absolutely know that if you're disengaged from one of the VSOs, the veteran service orgs, the best chance you got is to hear from a family member or friend. And that's why I remind everybody that we make a -- you know, payment to, "tell somebody."

And oddly enough -- or not surprisingly, but, you know, given my age it was odd -- (chuckles) -- they're not calling them. They're, you know, texting folks. And that's kind of what we want, the social media. We want that thing smoking. And they're doing (a force ?), actually, but a lot of my claims are actually folks that we didn't know about, so we know they're out there and they're coming into us. So we're getting the word out; it's just run out of time.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir -- oh, sorry -- (inaudible) -- we're going to --

Q Okay, and I'm sorry to ask this one last thing, and I will get off the phone: You said 30 -- how many of the 145,000 people, how many claims have you paid?

MR. HEBERT: Over 30,000.

Q Over 30,000.

MR. HEBERT: Yes.

Q Okay. The reason I ask is because the Army alone is 33,000, so I was wondering if you could be a little more specific than what --

MAJ. WHITLEY: There's a big difference between the ones that have been paid, folks, and the ones that we're tracking. I manage workflow. I know how many I have that are sitting at DFAS and how many are sitting in our office. OSD tracks actual payments from DFAS. So when you talk to, you know, one of the folks like me, one of the service reps, we have a more granular view of the world. We track the flow on a daily basis. Q All right. Thank you.

MAJ. WHITLEY: Yeah.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, gentlemen, for taking Jeff's (sp) questions. With that, I want to remind everybody of the website that both gentlemen had stated. It's www.defense.gov/stoploss.

In addition, everybody will get the transcript from today. Hopefully I can send it to you by the end of the day from Federal News. We'll also add it to the blog post. If you go to www.dodlive -- dod dot -- dodlive.mil, excuse me, and click on Blogger(s) Roundtable, you'll find a post from today.

You've been listening to Mr. Lernes Hebert. He's the acting director, Officer and Enlisted Personnel Management for the Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, and then also U.S. Army Major Roy Whitley, who is the Army's project manager for the retroactive stop loss special pay.

Again, thank you, gentlemen, for talking to us today. Thank you for everyone that called in. Thank you and feel free to disconnect at any time. Thanks.

END.